

Church of God

The Biblical Grandview

End-Time Readiness | Love Truth and Discernment

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I always say that it is amazing to me how much the world has changed since we were last here. As I look at the things around us and see where the world is today, it has changed a great deal during those three years. My wife and I firmly believe that God leads us through everything we do. We all have things to learn. Some lessons we know we need to learn, and others we do not even realize we need. Some are pleasant, and some are not. Yet they all help mold us into what God wants us to become.

That is one thing we always remember. Whatever God wants, wherever He leads, if we truly believe that He is directing our lives and directing His Church, then we should let Him do what He wants to do. He will make everything work according to His purpose. Our responsibility is to keep our eyes on Him and maintain faith in Him, with complete belief that Jesus Christ is returning and that He will rescue this world from everything it has become. Our job is to remain loyal to Him.

Let me talk about the world a little because that has been on my mind. Three years ago, when we left here, the United States had just elected a new president. He had not yet been inaugurated, and the world was full of hope. There was talk that wars would end quickly, inflation would disappear, and many of the nation's problems would be solved. It did not turn out exactly as expected.

Perhaps that reflects a larger reality: the world changes. Just as our lives change, the personalities, circumstances, and power structures of the world change. The people and conditions that existed a few years ago are no longer the same. Time moves on.

There is a verse in Romans, also found in the Old Testament, that says, "*The way of peace they have not known.*" That remains true today. Sometimes we should ask ourselves whether we truly know that way of peace. The peace God wants us to have is a fruit of His Holy Spirit. It comes from being led by His Spirit. We may know about it, but do we actually live it and apply it in our lives?

As we watch events unfolding around us, we must remember that time continues moving toward the return of Jesus Christ. Time is short for all of us. Some people speculate that Christ may not return for fifty years. He may return sooner, or later. But for every one of us, time is limited. I may die tomorrow. I may die before this sermon is over. Our individual time is short.

That reality often reminds me of 2 Peter 3, where people speak of the delay of Christ's coming. For you and me, however, our time is short, and we must be ready. That is what I want to discuss today.

Turn with me to Matthew 24. It reminds us of the age in which we live and what conditions will be like between now and the return of Jesus Christ. The things we see today will only become worse. God tells us in 2 Timothy 3:13 that evil conditions will continue to increase.

As I sometimes say, we are watching prophetic leaves and buds appear on the prophetic tree. We need to be aware of what is happening.

When Jesus Christ was asked by His disciples, "What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" He began with a simple statement found in Matthew 24:4: *"Take heed that no one deceives you."*

Pay attention to what is happening. Make sure you are doing what God wants you to do. Deception will increase as time progresses. Later in the chapter, Christ says that the deception will become so great that even the very elect could be deceived. When we read that, it should capture our attention. If Christ says that even the elect could be deceived, we had better remain alert and not allow ourselves to become spiritually drowsy or complacent.

Further down in Matthew 24:44, Christ says: *"Be ready."*

Be ready for that time because you do not know when your time will come. If we turn to Revelation 12, we learn who stands behind deception. Satan has many tools. He has many methods. He will use anything he can to draw us away from God's truth, lull us to sleep spiritually, and increase our distance from God. We all need to remain on guard.

Revelation 12:9 states:

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”

He deceives the whole world. We read throughout Scripture about the many deceptive methods Satan employs. Consider Eve in the Garden of Eden. She knew God. She had walked with Him and heard Him. Yet Satan was so cunning that he persuaded her to doubt and disbelieve God. When we stop and think about it, that is remarkable. If that could happen to Eve under those circumstances, how much more vigilant must we be today?

The entire world is deceived by Satan. Yet God has not called everyone at this time. You and I have been extraordinarily blessed. God has called us. He has given us the gift of repentance so that we can recognize the error of our former ways and choose to live according to His way. He has given us His Holy Spirit through repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands. That Spirit gives us the strength to overcome this world and become part of the life and hope Jesus Christ offers, rather than part of the death march of this age.

So again, keep on your guard. Pay attention. Be ready. The deception will be so great that even the elect could be deceived.

God, give us discernment. Give us the ability to understand what is happening around us. Help us discern what is good and what is evil, what is of You and what is

not. Help us distinguish light from darkness and choose the one while rejecting the other.

Hebrews tells us that mature believers, through constant practice, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Discernment is a gift from God. We should continually ask Him for more of it. Help us discern the times. Help us discern what is pleasing in Your sight rather than merely what we personally desire.

In 1 John we are told:

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

The Spirit of truth leads us into truth. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Loving the truth, knowing the truth, living the truth, and making it part of our lives are essential.

“Let us love one another, for love is of God.”

Agape is a fruit of the Spirit. We understand that love because God has given us His Spirit. As we talk about loving the truth, knowing the truth, practicing the truth, and preparing for the times ahead, we must always return to the Word of God.

The Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, and able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. Always go to the Bible. Measure what you hear against Scripture. Measure what you see against Scripture. Follow God. Follow Jesus Christ. Follow the Bible. Test everything by the Word of God and determine whether it is truly the way of truth.

If we remain committed to that course, we will be prepared for the return of Jesus Christ.